

Testimony of Marji McCaffery
Proponent of HB-505,
Clarifying Aiding or Soliciting Suicide
House Judiciary Committee
February 20, 2013

Vice Chairman Bennett and Committee Members:

I spent the last ten months with my mother. She was 85, very weak, and she had dementia. She died on January 25. My good friend described me as a midwife to her soul. I could do nothing for her frail body but I tried my best to care for her spirit. The people around us were successful in easing her pain.

Now I find HB505 coming up for a vote and I urge you to vote YES. Montanans deserve an end to the dispute over whether assisted suicide is legal in Montana. There will always be suicide and that is a sad fact. But suicide becomes homicide when it is "assisted". If a person needs assistance then death must come at the hands of some "other". This means that you are voting YES to prevent legalizing homicide.

The case to hasten death can only be made honestly by those who deny that human life is sacred and is the same as the life of an animal. A suffering or inconvenient animal can be humanely disposed of without eternal consequences. Not so with a human life – not so. When the end is near there is no mistaking how profound the moment is.

I won't deny the strain that end-of-life decisions put on family members and friends. Even when the suffering of the dying person is the primary stress, there are still medical and financial decisions that face the family day after day. It is unfamiliar territory. It is unpredictable and scary. But there is solid comfort in knowing that the decision for life has already been made. A culture of death and pro-death laws would work against the family and the medical community.

Relativism turns every situation into a fresh ethical debate. Good law rescues us from this unending drama. Good law in this case is HB-505. And then we must be available to comfort and support those who suffer. It is a beautiful experience to be a midwife to a soul.